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AUTHOR Shepherd, David
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the application of the concept of "discourse colony," a written text type, to the analysis of discourse used in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) testing and teacher education. The discourse colony includes a diverse collection of discourse types whose cohesion comes from their predictable organization (e.g., timetables, schedules, newspapers, instructions, prayer and hymn books, legal statutes). A discourse colony is defined as having nine specific potential properties. A British Broadcasting Corporation publication entitled "London Calling," a monthly magazine commonly used for some short-term ESL courses, and 19 ESL methods articles from an ESL teachers' publication were analyzed by application of the nine criterion properties. It is concluded that while the phenomenon of a discourse colony is universal within literate societies, the identification of discourse markers predicting colonies is problematic. One of the methods articles is appended. (MSE)

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David Shepherd. July, 1990.

"DISCOURSE COLONIES WITHIN TEFL METHODS ARTICLES".

1. INTRODUCTION.

This paper will define and describe the properties of a written text type which Hoey (1986) has coined a "discourse colony". Mention will then be made of attempts to apply the concept to EFL testing and TEFL teacher development. The placing of "discourse colonies" within the organization of discourse from a selection of TEFL methods articles will be described and, finally, the role of title and headings from a single text example of a colony within a TEFL methods article will be analyzed with possible reader difficulties in mind.

2. THE "DISCOURSE COLONY" : DEFINING AND DESCRIBING.

The discourse colony, a term coined by Hoey (1986:6), incorporates a diverse collection of discourses including timetables of all kinds, published lists of programmes to be broadcast, Common Prayer books,newspapers, instructions, hymn books and legal statutes, to name but a few. Thus, although it is argued that their is a certain heterogeneity in terms of their discourse properties, colonies vary substantially in terms of both their utility and physical make-up. Whereas discourses are generally formed by continuous, cohesive prose, (coined "mainstream discourse" by Hoey,1986:2) the discourse colony normally has no formal cohesive ties between its sections. The cohesion is obtained from the sequence of ordering systems, from arbitrary alphabetic (e.g. dictionaries) or numbering (e.g.club rules) systems, to non-arbitrary time (e.g. conference programmes) or date (e.g. itineraries) systems. Cohesion is given by a "framing context" in the form of a heading which predicts the system of organization. The cohesion created by these systems is therefore different from the specific function of the formal linguistic items, including conjunctions, lexical and grammatical cohesion. Nevertheless these systems ensure that colonies act as functional unities and therefore create their own texture.

If the sentences of a "mainstream discourse" are jumbled together coherence is tampered with and the meaning therefore altered. In contrast, the sequence of "discourse colony" components can be altered without overall change in meaning, in that the discourse will continue to say the same things; a single component takes its meaning (though not its utility) from the whole discourse rather than its relations with its neighboring items in a sequence.

The choice of the term "colony" (Hoey,1986:5) is a reflection of the fact that the discourse type and the relations between its parts are not unlike those pertaining within a hill, or hive, between the various types of ant or bee. In an effort to make the analogy more transparent Hoey (1986:5) has compared a "mainstream discourse" to the anthropomorphic model of a body; this has its interconnected parts, each with a separate function, but cannot exist in isolation, at least not without artificial (i.e. medical) interference. Whereas the organization of the latter is physical, the organizational function of the colony is social.

Hoey (1986:20) has isolated nine potential criterial properties for a discourse colony as follows:

"1. Meaning not derived from sequence;
2. Adjacent units do not form continuous prose;
3. There is a framing context;
4. No single author and/or anon;
5. One component may be used without referring to others;
6. Components can be reproduced or reused in subsequent works;
7. Components may be added, removed or altered;
8. Many of the components share the same function;
9. Alphabetic, numeric or temporal sequencing."

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3. PREVIOUS TEFL EXPERIENCES WITH DISCOURSE COLONIES.

3.1. APPLYING THE COLONY CONCEPT TO TEFL TESTING.

The present writer's first attempt to apply the insights gained from Hoey's description of the "discourse colony" were made in 1987, after considering his suggestion of possible links between the concept and the testing of reading strategies.(Hoey,1986:22-25). An edition of the BBC's "Radio Times" was analyzed in terms of its discourse types and made the text source for an examination designed to test the ability of EFL students to use skimming, search as well as scanning strategies. The students were being prepared for the "Royal Society of Arts Examination in the Communicative Use of English: Advanced Reading" paper the materials submitted in December, 1987.

3.2. DISCOURSE COLONIES ON AN INSET-TEFL COURSE.

A second attempt at applying Hoey's nine criterial properties to text was made using the BBC publication "London Calling". This monthly magazine had been used as text on short-term INSET-TEFL courses for Brazilian public sector staff because it was readily available, relatively inexpensive, and more attractive than textbooks. Above all it was seen as a means of stimulating reading as well as listening outside the confines of course and classroom. The same publication provided a wealth of text exemplification of the "discourse colony" from the lists of broadcasts in various languages, to world frequencies, titles of the day-to-day programmes (similar to the "Radio Times"), a one-sentence review of regular features under the title "At A Glance", to a monthly "Letters" column. These texts were matched against the nine criteria proposed by Hoey and found to be central, rather than marginal, examples of the discourse phenomenon. These findings are illustrated in the table below, which incorporates the method of presentation and the legend suggested by the same writer: (Hoey, 1986:20)

" + indicates that a colony has this property
- indicates that a colony does not have this property
? indicates that it is arguable whether a colony has this property or may not always have this property "

Following Hoey's format the nine properties are represented by numbers 1 to 9, at the top of the table, horizontally.

Table 1. : Properties of Discourse Colonies in "BBC London Calling", June,1988.

PROPERTIES -> TEXT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	TOTAL
"At A glance"	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9
"Drama Preview"	+	+	+	+	+	-	?	+	-	6/7
"Features Preview"	+	+	+	+	+	-	?	+	-	6/7
"Music Preview"	+	+	+	+	+	-	?	+	-	6/7
"Sports Preview"	+	+	+	+	+	-	?	+	-	6/7
"Your Letters"	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	?	-	5/6
"World Servive Frequencies"	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	?	8/9
"Broadcasts in	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9

Other Languages"										
"BBC London Calling" (entire magazine)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	8

This analysis pointed to the fact that any attempt to define a discursively-tidy typology for the occurence of the "discourse colony" is certain to lead to frustration. The concept encompasses a collection of discourses which will have certain features in common, but which are not shared by all. Mirroring their heterogeneity of appearance, the colonies should also be seen as pertaining to a cline in terms of their discourse features. It will therefore not be possible to provide a definition of a colony which includes rigid criteria for obligatory features.

Although this may be of intrinsic interest to those of us of a text analytic inclination the TEFL practitioner pundits might justifiably question the wisdom of devoting effort to such an exercise and query its worth in terms of its application to foreign language learning. However, the use of "London Calling" as a platform for demonstrating the differences between the numerous "discourse colonies" and the "mainstream discourse" of the letters, as well as lengthier descriptions of programmes, provided a valuable pedagogic experience for the teachers concerned. It illustrated the need for flexibility in choosing reading strategies for different discourse types. In doing so it proved successful,where many other attempts have failed. (Shepherd, 1988) Many of the TEFL public sector staff had made exclusive use of "mainstream discourse" as text for teaching.They had also automatically switched into intensive language-based comprehension of written text, as both readers and teachers, which had led, inevitably, into into slower information processing strategies. (Schiffrin, 1987) By heightening the teachers' awareness of the plethora of discourse types available, as well as the range of reading strategies which can be justifiably included in a teaching/ learning programme, the study of "discourse colonies" had developed potential as successful TEFL practitioners.

4.THE PLACE OF COLONIES IN THE DISCOURSE ORGANIZATION OF TEFL METHODS ARTICLES.

A total of 19 TEFL methods articles from a single edition of "English Teaching Forum" (January, 1990) were analyzed in an effort to provide a description of stereotypical text features. These, in turn, will be used as a means to identify possible dificulties which Brazilian public sector teachers have in reading the same articles. The paucity of the data analyzed means that any findings are no more than tentative. Nevertheless there would appear to be a generalized macro-pattern or "consensus" (a term used by Winter,1976) in evidence. This consists of a series of sections (first identified by Edge, 1989), each of which contains a choice of writer moves. However what each writer must provide is a declaration regarding the purpose of the article, in addition to a series of practical steps aimed at fulfilling this purpose.

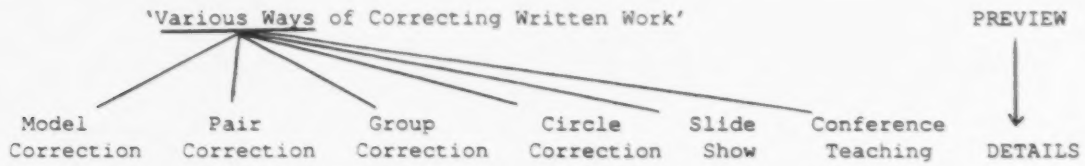
The most complex and most exciting sections of the 19 TEFL methods articles were those in which the authors presented these practical teaching suggestions. Within these sections a total of 29 discourse colonies have been identified. The credentials of these passages singled out as colonies were matched against the nine properties suggested by Hoey. Of the 29 instances 15 were identified as central to the type, with eight properties, as all had a specified author. Eight have a total of seven properties, as they are written in continuous prose. The remaining six colonies have six properties, as all the authors are specified, are written in continuous prose, and have neither alphabetic, numeral nor temporal sequencing.

To confirm our hypotheses that these discourses can be singled out according to Hoey's criteria, the nine properties were also applied to the final article in the January 1990 "Forum", written by Ndoma. His discourse includes a description of the several elements which made up a new course created in response to the difficulties of teacher training situations in Zaire. However, these were found

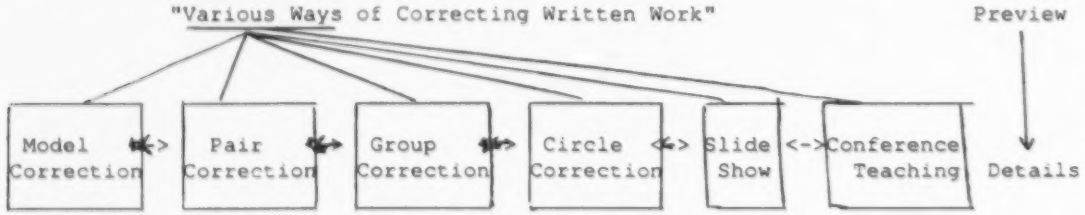
to match with only two of the nine criterial properties.

5. WRITER SIGNALLING AND READER INTERPRETATION OF A "DISCOURSE COLONY".

Clearly the phenomenon of a discourse colony is universal within literate societies and therefore the concept would not in itself pose a difficulty for the audience of TEFL teachers as readers. What may prove problematic, however, is the identification of discourse markers of prediction signalling "colonies" and their relations with other parts of a discourse. Thus a heading or title may act as the first member of a "Preview-Detail" clause relation (Hoey, 1983:138), the details being realized by the colonies proper. In the article by Xiaochun, Appenxix 1, for example, the title 'Various Ways of Correcting Written Work' is a cataphoric device signalling further details. The term 'Various Ways' is an "Enumerative' predictive category (Tadros; 1985:47) signalling a commitment to provide more detailed descriptions of the 'ways'. This is illustrated in the following diagram:



A number of the TEFL methods articles in the data present the practical suggestions as a series of consecutive steps for a single lesson or activity, or as a series of modules (or units) within a language learning programme, which should be followed in a consecutive manner to have any pedagogic significance. However where these practical suggestions are presented within "colonies" the readers will need to recognize that the order of the component parts is not an essential for coherence and that these parts are, in a sense, self sufficient. In other words they will need to be aware that (Hoey,1986:20) "The meaning is not derived from sequence"; that "One component may be used without referring to others"; and that "Components may be removed or altered", if texts are to be interpreted coherently. As the different components of colonies often share the same function within the discourse they form "Matching" clause relations of comparison.(Winter,1986:92). They are therefore fundamentally different to the essential chronological format of the alternative modes of presentation of the practical suggestions, i.e. the single lesson plan or the outline of a series of steps/units within a learning programme. These "Matching" relations, which imply interchangeability, can be illustrated by the same section headings in the text by Xiaochun (Appendix 1):



("<-->" = matching relation)

The text example from Xiaochun's article demonstrates the important discourse roles of titles and headings and underlines the need for readers to pay careful attention to their potential as indicators of writer intention and aims.

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reduces the teacher's correction work, but it requires full preparation beforehand.

Conference teaching

The sixth technique is conference teaching.

As its name suggests, in this method the teacher has an individual conference with each student during the course of the writing. The teacher asks the students to write on a topic in class. Then s/he goes to the first student to talk to him about what he should do in the first stage of his writing, in the second stage, etc.—what he should write, what organization, sentence structure, what things he should avoid writing, etc. When s/he finishes with the first student, s/he goes to the second student, then to the third student, and so on, until s/he finishes his/her conferences with everyone in class.

When the teacher talks to a student s/he must be sure that they talk in great detail —about style, organization, content, paragraphs, use of words, spelling, etc. When the teacher finishes the first round of talking, there may be a need to confer with the students a second time, or even a third or fourth time. In short, the teacher continues with the conferences until every student finishes the entire composition. Then the only work left for the teacher is to mark the students' papers.

This conference teaching is suitable for a small class (10–15 students). It reduces the teacher's work.

Variously valuable

Each of the above six different ways has its own value. The model correction, the technique of letting the students watch an overhead projector show, and conference teaching reduce the teacher's work to a minimum. The pair and group discussions have the value of getting the students themselves to do the correcting, thus giving the students a chance to become trained critically. The circle correction benefits the students in two ways.

I use these correction techniques interchangeably. The model correction, pair/group correction, and conference teaching are the ones I most prefer. Try some of them if you are a composition-correcting teacher. ■

Appendix

Various Ways of Correcting Written Work

Li Xiaochun
Jishou University

Some teachers stress the importance of getting the students themselves to identify and correct mistakes in their written work, as part of the process of drafting, correcting, and finalizing their composition. Perhaps the most important reason to give students opportunities to correct their written work is that it helps them develop a self-critical attitude. But this valuable critical ability cannot be developed unless the students are given opportunities to exercise it at the early stages of writing. And the students feel bored if they always do the correcting themselves. On the other hand, if the teacher always does the correcting, it is too much work for him/her, and it is monotonous for the students.

Thus we can see that there is no one way of correcting compositions that is intrinsically superior to others. What we should do is to choose the procedure that seems most effective in dealing with a particular type of mistake.

The various correction techniques I offer

here are based on my experience. They're effective, interesting, and beneficial to the students—in addition to reducing the teacher's work.

Model correction

The first technique is to use compositions by five students as a model for correction.

This technique can be used when the whole class has been asked to write on the same topic. The teacher checks five compositions, underlines the mistakes, and indicates the nature of each one by writing the appropriate correction symbol in the margin (such as "sp" for a spelling mistake, "ww" for a wrong word, etc.). After a very detailed correction of those five compositions, the teacher should try to determine the most frequent mistakes that the whole class has made; should try to anticipate other possible problems; and then should write a comment about what is good and what is unnecessary or unrelated to the topic of each piece. During the next class meeting the teacher deals in detail with the five compositions, explains the mistakes and problems, and makes comments. After the explanation, the teacher asks the students to correct their own compositions, telling them to keep in mind what has been talked about in class. While the students are making the corrections, the teacher should walk around the class, ready to help the students and provide them with feedback.

Pair correction

The second technique is pair correction.

Ask the students to correct each other's compositions (student A corrects student B's, B corrects A's) and hand in their corrected work to the teacher. The teacher corrects them again and marks them. Then the teacher returns the twice-corrected compositions to the student editors, telling them to pay attention to the differences between the teacher's corrections and their own.

The student is actually comparing his own written work to that of his peers when he is in the process of correcting others' compositions. Seeing his fellow students' obvious careless mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, he may be made more aware of his own mistakes and become ashamed of his carelessness, saying to himself that he'll not make such mistakes next time. Also, through comparison, he gradually becomes aware that there are different ways of saying things.

The reason the teacher needs to correct again is that there may be miscorrected or uncorrected mistakes, or there may be students who are too lazy to do the correcting. Thus the teacher's correction serves as the final feedback both to the writer and the student editor. The students—both the writer and the editor—will know how successful they have been.

Group discussion

The third technique is group discussion.

The teacher divides the students into groups of three to five each, depending on the size of the class. Give each group three or five compositions from other groups. Tell them to correct the compositions by group discussion: discuss what has been written, identify and correct the mistakes. When they finish, they hand them in to the teacher for marking. While the students are engaged in the group discussion, the teacher should discuss the compositions with the students as a participant and guide as well as a problem solver. I have done this many times. This is what I do:

I divide the students into six groups: A, B, C, D, E, and F. Each group has five students (for my class is a big one, 30 students in all). I give group A five compositions written by the students in group B, and give group B group A's compositions, Group C group D's, group D group C's, etc. Next I instruct the students in how to correct the compositions and what to correct by group discussion. After I'm sure that all the students understand my instructions clearly, I let them begin their discussions. I join in as a helper, a question answerer, and a guide. I make sure to participate in each group's discussion. When they have all finished, I gather in all the compositions for marking.

The value of this procedure is that it provides the students with opportunities to develop their critical ability.

Circle correction

The fourth technique is circle correction.

The teacher reads every composition and identifies "problem sentences" by using correction symbols. After finishing this identification the teacher should write a comment on the composition about the organization, style, use of words, sentence structure, etc., pointing out the weak points. Then the teacher gives the compositions back to the students to be rewritten according to the teacher's corrections and comments. After they finish rewriting, they hand the compositions in again for the second set of corrections and comments. When the teacher finishes the second correction, the compositions are again given back to the students for the second revision. After that, the teacher, for the third time, makes corrections and comments, and gives a final mark to every piece, thus completing the correction cycle.

Compared to the first three, this procedure is time-consuming for the teacher. But the students benefit in at least two ways: First, this technique shifts the emphasis from teaching to learning. As we know, language learning is largely a personal thing which the individual has to do himself. What the teacher does, especially at the college level, is to guide, to control the "input." The teacher should try his best to increase the learner's "intake." Another benefit of this technique is that it develops in the student the habit of revising and rewriting. Writers begin to write, stop, go back, reread what they've written, and rewrite. Writing is thought to be not so much a process through which one reports one's thought; rather, it is a way in which writers explore and clarify their thoughts and even discover new ideas.

Slide show

The fifth technique is to let the students watch an OHP show.

The teacher writes down the topic on which the students are to write and shows it on the overhead projector. The teacher must write a draft beforehand. S/he tells the students to look at what s/he is writing while s/he is doing the composition on the overhead projector and to try to find the wrong things that s/he writes. The teacher must think hard, beforehand, to make the kinds of mistakes that his/her students might make. As soon as the teacher finishes the piece, s/he should explain, analyze, and discuss every sentence in terms of the points they should pay attention to, such as style, spelling, grammar, expressions, etc. After the teacher makes sure that the students have a very clear idea about the writing, s/he asks them to write on the same topic, and to hand it in for marking.

The composition written by the teacher on the overhead projector is actually a model for the students, and such careless mistakes as spelling, punctuation, grammar, and wrong expressions can be avoided. This

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